DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 046 PS 030 621

AUTHOR	Vestal, Anita
TITLE	Peacebuilding Webs of Home, School and Community.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	18p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Conflict Resolution; Emotional Development; Empowerment; Moral Development; Peace; Preschool Curriculum; Preschool Education; Prevention; *Problem Solving; Teacher Student Relationship; Theories; Violence
IDENTIFIERS	Optimism; *Peace Education

ABSTRACT

The complexities of child and youth violence suggest that the solution requires a concerted approach. This paper draws upon research studies that seek to isolate the root causes of violence and the effect of exposure to violence on children. Factors from the home, school, and community environments may provide both the cause and the cure. There is growing evidence that programs that emphasize the development of social and emotional skills in young children hold promise for the socialization of at-risk children. Theories of moral development, emotional literacy, and learned optimism are reviewed as research-based options for immunizing children from the invitation to violence they experience on a regular basis in today's society. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the paper weaves together current thinking in public health, psychology, education, and community development. Theoretical constructs in peacebuilding and empowerment are identified for their transformative potential to create the foundation for long term structural change. Schwerin's 8-step plan for grassroots empowerment of people to change society is explained. Lederach's integrated framework for community peacebuilding is outlined, along with Reardon's concept of cultivating social imagination and envisioning peace. (Contains 28 references.) (Author/KB)

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Peacebuilding Webs of Home, School and Community

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In searching for the causes of the tragic episodes at schools in Jonesboro, AR, Pearl, MS, Paducah, KY, Springfield OR and Littleton, CO, questions about freedom of speech and the right to bear arms often surface. Some believe that parents are not raising children responsibly or supervising their activities. Others feel the answer to the problem of violence that pervades our society today may be in regulating guns or amending the intent of freedom of speech. Those proponents need to consider whether international media and internet content on a worldwide web can be controlled. Bernard Friedlander of the University of Hartford, who has studied children's development and mass media, believes the problem and its solution is much more complex. Dr. Friedlander states, "It is naïve and old fashioned to think we can somehow control children's exposure to violence by challenging the First Amendment to try to regulate program content." (Friedlander, 1993, p.70). The problem of violence by and against children and youth in America is a complex and systemic issue; the solution needs to be targeted to root causes and an approach that is comprehensive enough to impact structural systems and institutions in

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American society. This essay examines various facets of violence and children and gives several recommendations for transforming our culture of violence into a paradigm of peace.

Roots of Violence in the Child's Environment

Researchers who have studied violence and its effects on children have consistently reported that there is a cycle of violence that becomes perpetual in areas of high political conflict or community violence (Byrne, 1997; Emde, 1993; Garbarino, et.al., 1992). It is clear that in violent communities, children and their parents begin to accept violence *and to expect it.* When they are continually exposed to aggression and violence, whether in the neighborhood or on television, children begin to model it. The child's environment and whether the environment reinforces aggression by providing aggressive models may primarily determine aggressiveness in children (Huesmann & Eron, 1986). When a child feels victimized by his or her environment, or feels that the environment instigates aggression, whether it be the home, school or neighborhood, the child is likely to act out aggression.

Exposure to violence increases the risk that children will engage in future violence and other antisocial acts. In learning to adapt to violence, children may begin to model themselves and their behavior on those aggressive individuals who are perpetrating the violence in their communities (Garbarino, et. al. 1992). During their formative years, children can be taught to hate and to accept violence as the norm. Childhood recognition and acceptance of conflict creates a vicious cycle of violence, one that is difficult to break in adulthood. Antisocial behavior thus becomes the expected norm (Byrne, 1997).

The Effects of Violence on Children

There has been little research on the effect of external trauma on children's development, including social, emotional and psychological development (Byrne, 1997; Garbarino, et.al., 1992; Reiss, et.al., 1993). In their study for the National Institutes of Mental Health, Martinez and Richters (1993) report that..." there has been no systematic research to date concerning the psychological consequences to children of being raised in chronically violent neighborhoods." (p. 22). However, we know that children react in a number of ways when victimized or suffering from violence or trauma. An individual's response could include feelings of withdrawal, avoidance or denial, self-blame, helplessness, anger and hostility (Garbarino, et.al., 1992). Martin Seligman (1991) shows how a child is caught off guard by an act of violence or trauma. Unless the child's sense of inner control is restored, "learned helplessness" may become a habitual response. Repeated exposure to violence can lead a child to adapt and respond in ways that may function in the short run; but long term adaptation to violence can be detrimental as he or she comes to expect more violence (Garbarino, et.al. 1992).

Children are more vulnerable to trauma when it occurs at an early age. Acts of intentional evil, person against person, undermine a child's basic trust in humanity and may create a lifelong inability to develop close, trusting relationships (Garbarino, et.al,., 1992). When violence is an accepted and expected part of living in a society, it will also impact the moral development of very young children (Emde, 1993). Osofsky, and others (1993) studied distress symptoms in children that were associated with exposure to violence. They offer the following list of behaviors that might be expected to occur more often in children living in situations of chronic violence: (p. 44)

1. In school, they may have difficulty concentrating because of both lack of sleep and intrusive imagery.

2. They may also experience memory impairment because of avoidance or intrusive thoughts

3. They may develop anxious attachment with their mothers, being fearful of leaving them or sleeping alone

4. Their play may become more aggressive related to imitating behaviors they have seen as well as showing a desperate effort to protect themselves.

5. They may "act tough" to deal with their fear, developing a counter-phobic reaction.

6. They may act uncaring because of having to deal with so much hurt and loss.

7. They may become severely constricted in activities, exploration and thinking for fear of re-experiencing the traumatic event.

Post Traumatic Stress

The effects of traumatic events, such as the incidents of neighborhood or school violence experienced and witnessed by children, has been studied by many researchers (Cairns, 1996; Volkan, 1997; Garbarino, et. al, 1992). In post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), " ...the internalized version of trauma remains in the minds of victims long after the overwhelming physical danger disappears. The victims relive the trauma in daydreams and dreams, suffer amnesia, or may become hypervigilant or completely dissociated from the idea of danger. Their responses to others are often contaminated with their reactions to their victimizers; they interchange their own identities with those of the aggressors, and they merge aspects of different events." (Volkan, 1997, pp 41-42).

The Society for Traumatic Stress Studies classifies primary and secondary victims of trauma as follows: If a crime is perpetrated against a child, the child is the primary victim. If a child witnesses an event in which someone else is victimized, or has a relationship with the primary victim, that child is a secondary victim (Garbarino, et.al., 1992). Victimization and the

psycho-emotional issues that accompany it are an added stressor to an already over stressed childhood burden being carried today. When victimized some children may respond with withdrawal, avoidance, denial and other self protective responses that in essence remove them from full participation in their world of family, school and community. Other children may react by developing angry and hostile behavior patterns and tend to identify with the aggressor (Garbarino, et al. 1992 Volkan, 1997; Byrne,1997; Reiss, et.al., 1993).

Violence Breeds Violence

Repeated exposure to violence may lead to an expectation of violence, a resignation that violence is going to be an ever present part of life. These psychological injuries may be a breeding ground for violence and victimization. Lorion and Saltzmann (1993) suggest that "...children of violence may despairingly conclude that, time available notwithstanding, they have neither the resources nor the likelihood of achieving lasting or socially approved outcomes. For them socially unacceptable and risky, albeit immediately rewarding, alternatives may become highly attractive. In turn, their choices may perpetuate that very environment of violence that limited their options. " (p. 56)

Unfortunately, some parenting practices in areas of chronic violence may impede the children's normal development. "Driven by survival, mothers often do not allow their children to play outside because of fears there may be a shooting. The children are denied opportunities to engage in social and athletic play. Restricted play opportunities for children can make for restricted development." (Garbarino, et.al. p.64). Parents living in high crime environments may impose very restrictive and punitive styles of discipline (including physical assault) in an effort to protect them from gangs and drug dealers in the neighborhood and to keep the assertive boys

from getting into trouble with teachers or the police. Unfortunately this approach models for children an endorsement of violence as a means for social control. (Garbarino, et.al. p. 65).

Besides emotional and psychological pain, violence is taking an increasingly high toll of physical injury on our young people. Conflict and violence leading to homicide is a growing trend for our youth population. Homicide is the leading cause of death for young men of color, with a homicide rate of 85.6 per 100,000. The homicide rate for young men 15 to 25 is more than twenty times higher than most European countries and more than seven times higher than Canadian statistics (Prothrow-Stith, 1991).

How to break the cycle of violence

In order to break the cycle of violence that threatens our adolescents, in particular, new ways of handling anger and resolving conflict must be introduced early. Middle school and high school may be too late to introduce conflict resolution skills. The new skills need to be taught to the very youngest children. "Once a child has established a pattern of using verbal and physical force to get what he wants, breaking that pattern is extremely tough. Research confirms what every good preschool teacher knows: That the negative attention aggressive children receive gratifies them and reinforces their behavior." (Prothrow-Stith, 1991, p. 154).

Acting out to get attention seems to produce more aggression. Research has found a positive relationship between emotion regulation that is "maladaptive" and conduct problems such as fighting, lying and defiance. Several studies suggest that young children with conduct problems tend to use aggressive strategies and vent their anger (Garber & Dodge, 1991; Eisenberg, et.al., 1997; Zahn-Waxler, et.al, 1996). Brenner and Salovey (1997) argue that children with behavior problems have less insight into their own and others' emotional experiences. One of our challenges should be to develop emotional competence in our children.

Can emotional development be encouraged at an early age and can young children learn to manage their emotions appropriately? Research shows that the answer to both questions is affirmative. According to Daniel Goleman (1995) in his best selling book, *Emotional Intelligence*, the earliest years of life offer opportunities for shaping emotional intelligence. "The impact of parenting on emotional competence starts in the cradle." (p. 192). Mayer and Salovey (1997) suggest that as children mature, they develop skills and abilities that lead to more advanced emotion regulation processes.

University of Pennsylvania psychologist, Martin Seligman agrees that children can learn positive emotional responses at a young age. He has developed a theory of learned optimism and personal control and tested it with thousands of school children. "We can teach our children the skills of a flexible and reality-based optimism." (Seligman, 1995, p. 9) While Seligman and his colleagues are concerned with building skills to teach optimism as a way of immunizing children against depression and other psychological problems, other researchers are concerned with promoting social competence in children.

Goleman suggests that preschools need to emphasize social and emotional skills more systematically. He argues that "preschool programs such as Head Start ... can have beneficial long-term emotional and social effects on the lives of its graduates even into their early adult years -- fewer drug problems and arrests, better marriages, greater earning power." (Goleman, 1995, p. 273). Dr. Prothrow-Stith (1991) argues that society has an urgent task in developing social and emotional learning so as to avoid antisocial behavior and prevent violent behaviors. "When social programs are designed with the real needs of real people in mind, we know we can make life better for poor parents and their at-risk children. Programs that succeed are intensive,

comprehensive, flexible, and staffed by professionals with the time and skills to establish solid relationships it their clients." (Prothrow-Stith, 1991, p. 200). Dr. Prothrow-Stitch, who has been a public health official in the state of Massachusetts praises Head Start. "For twenty five years, Head Start has been preparing at-risk youngsters for school . One long-term study found that Head Start "graduates" dropped out of school one-third less often than the young people in a control group. Young people in the control group were placed in special education six times more often than members of the Head Start cohort. Another Head Start study found that at the age of 19, twice as many Head Start "graduates" were employed, in college or receiving more training than those in the control group (Prothrow-Stith, 1991, p. 201.)

Some experts believe that a lack of community structure contributes to the problem of adolescent fascination with violence. Perhaps the communities, including the families, extracurricular and religious communities, are not paying attention to our children and youth. "Without the connectedness of real community, there's no checks on the cynicism," says William Damon of Stanford University's Center on Adolescence (Koerner, 1999). Youths may be giving signs and indicators that they are on the verge of a traumatic episode. Parents, friends and program leaders may be aware of these signs, but choose to ignore them. Perhaps they don't know how to deal with the teenagers, or perhaps they don't have the time or patience to get involved. Scott Poland, a school psychologist who led crisis teams at school shootings said, "We have a number of troubled children who have a history of bullying, are fascinated with guns, violence and bombs, have been teased, or are outcasts. It's time to end the culture of silence." (Why?, 1999). Emde (1993) has studied the implications for moral development in a culture that expects and glorifies aggression. Another challenge should be to re-create institutions and communities that are responsive to children's needs; where acceptable alternatives to aggression are taught and reinforced.

Transformation of education

The institution of public education is uniquely positioned to lead the transformation from a culture of violence to a paradigm of peace. Changes in priorities, with an increased emphasis on peace education and social-emotional skill development, would need to filter throughout every level of the hierarchy. Training of teachers and administrators in the new approaches and models would need to be universal. Garbarino, et.al (1992) suggest the need to "Emphasize the role of caring relationships with significant adults as the principle agent of change and source of support. Through training, consultation and supervision, teachers can be encouraged to provide a developmentally appropriate and cooperative classroom experience that is responsive to the social and emotional needs of the children." (p. 130). While the training and policy development is in process, immediate steps could begin. The crisis prevention approach, proposed by the National School Safety Center, starts with the development of an anti-violence plan for each school (Create an anti-violence, 1998). In a study of critical elements of promising violence prevention programs, the authors recommend the following key components of a successful anti-violence approach: prevention programs should begin early; interventions should be developmentally appropriate; content should promote personal and social competence; interactive techniques should be used to facilitate the development of personal and social skills; learning material should be culturally sensitive; activities should be designed to foster norms against violence, aggression, and bullying (Dusenbury, et. al., 1997).

Many experts suggest that introduction of skill building in conflict resolution and emotional competence needs to start before school age. The American Psychological Association proposed three major initiatives geared to the preschool population. First we need to have early childhood interventions directed toward parents, child care providers and health care providers to

help build the critical foundation of attitudes, knowledge, and behavior related to aggression. Secondly the mass media's potential to be part of the solution should be developed. Lastly, the curriculum should emphasize education programs to reduce prejudice and hostility -- two factors that lead to hate crimes and violence against social groups (Bey & Turner, 1996).

Clearly the role of the teacher is critical. Lantieri & Patti (1996) feel that the teacher is the key to successful peace education in schools. "One of the biggest challenges in moving toward a classroom capable of transforming kids is that as teachers we have to transform ourselves before we can expect to see changes in young people. In order to model the behavior of the peaceful classroom, we must first come to terms with our own approach to conflict, our own biases. In order to help young people confront their prejudices, we have to be able to confront our own. Only then can we help young people understand such deep concepts as what racism is and how society has oppressed people of color and others because of their differences." (Lantieri & Patti, 1996, p. 122)

In their work on peacebuilding strategies for the schools, Lantieri & Patti (1996) outline a set of social and emotional competencies to be developed in children. (Table 1)

Table 1

Core Skills that Facilitate Social and Emotional Competence (Lantieri & Patti, 1996)

Skill Area	***Competencies of Socially Competent Children***
Self Control And Self-Regulation Skills	Behave ethically and act responsibly toward others Develop sound work habits, motivation and values Listen carefully and accurately Remembering and following directions Concentration and follow through on tasks Calming self down Avoid being provoked to anger

Social Awareness And Group Participation Skills	Possess a positive sense of self worth Feel capable as they interact with others Appreciate the benefits of a multiracial society Possess skills in interpersonal encounters and communication Get along with others Develop long term interpersonal relationships Accept praise or approval Choose caring friends Assess when help is needed and able to ask for it Work as part of a problem-solving team
Social Decision-Making Skills And Problem-Solving Skills	Recognize feelings in oneself and in others Ability to describe feelings in self and others Setting realistic interpersonal goals Ability to see the effects of one's choices on self and others Select solutions that can reach goals Anticipate obstacles to goals Learn from experience

Transformation of communities

The transformation of our society from a culture of violence to a paradigm of peace should begin with the most basic unit of our society, the family. Parents can make positive changes to help children become more caring. One simple way is to monitor television viewing. Research consistently identifies three problems associated with children's repeated viewing of television violence. These are 1) children are more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others; 2) they may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others; and 3) they may become more fearful of the world around them. Parents can plan family viewing, monitor what the children watch, and communicate with network and cable stations to express opinions about programming (Horton & Zimmer, 1990).

Moving from the basic unit of the family, there is potential for transformation of community structures to actively bring about the paradigm of peace. John Paul Lederach proposes an

integrated framework for creating a community peacebuilding paradigm. His framework links two models, level of response and a timeframe model. Five major elements are identified and elaborated in an exquisitely detailed approach, which can respond to immediate crisis situations while building the foundation for long term structural change. Lederach's model includes: (Lederach, 1997)

- Root causes
- Crisis Management
- Vision
- Transformation
- Prevention

Lederach's model could be used to transform both education and the community in an effort to reach our children and to take back our communities. Quality of life can again be restored to the people by the people. In conjunction with Lederach's approach, Ed Schwerin (1995) calls for an eight step plan to empower people to transform politics. The eight empowerment components that Schwerin has outlined are: (Schwerin, 1995, p. 61-71):

1. Self-esteem - is the evaluative function of the self concept. High self esteem indicates a positive attitude toward oneself and one's behavior. Similar terms are self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-respect. Self esteem is basic to a person's mental health, and is necessary on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy before one can achieve a state of self actualization.
2. Self-efficacy - refers to the experience of one's self as a cause agent. High self efficacy is a positive attitude about one's control over the environment. Those with adequate self efficacy can cope with the demands of the situations they encounter. It differs from self esteem in that self esteem is the evaluation of one's self worth, while self efficacy is a judgment about one's personal capabilities.

3. Knowledge and skills - basic literacy, and practical knowledge and skills that enable an individual to survive in a dynamic environment. Self knowledge such as one's goals, values, limitations, and strengths are fundamental to increasing and maintaining self empowerment. Skills such as stress management and coping skills, communication, negotiation, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills.
4. Political awareness - enables people to develop their own concepts of social justice and provides conceptual tools to realize those goals. Understanding the political game requires identifying the power elite and key players and a critical political analysis which identify key factors related to disempowerment and social injustice.
5. Social participation - participation in a broad spectrum of community groups, organizations, and activities, such as interest clubs, community & civic organizations, self help groups, church groups, etc. These associations meet needs for affiliation, meaningful service, and achievement. Can provide a support system to help people cope with stress and can increase self esteem and self efficacy.
6. Political participation - four types:
   - politics as usual, or mainstream political involvement in voting, fund raising, letter writing campaigns, lobbying, etc.
   - transformational politics, usually beginning with a political critique that attempts to reveal the root causes of alienation, injustice, social violence, or other systemic problems. It seeks to demonstrate structural and institutional shortcomings with the present system. There is a debate over whether individual or structural transformation must come first.
7. Political rights and responsibilities: taking control of your own life and making decisions, accepting responsibility for your self and for others.
8. Resources - all of the nonmaterial psychological and social resources and the material resources needed to meet human needs and interests.

Authentic transformation of our communities, our institutions and our society from a culture that supports violence to one that supports peace and conflict resolution, must be a grass roots movement. There must be a return to true democratic participation. Lederach's model provides a framework, while Schwerin's work provides actionable steps individuals can make to begin to transform from the inside out.

Visioning a peaceful world

Betty Reardon (1989) calls for the cultivation of a "social imagination" to bolster the fearful society we have devolved into. Reardon believes we need to focus learning on developing the capacity to care and nurture. She insists that change cannot be achieved unless we can envision it, communicate it and rally others to support the changes. Reardon's thinking parallels that of Mahatma Gandhi who believed in being a catalyst for change by influencing society through personal acts of self-control and activism.

In creating our vision for a more peaceful and harmonious existence for our children, let us recall the words of Thomas Jefferson that have become the foundation for our rights and liberties in this country. He spoke of self evident truths -- life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- that are the foundation of human rights in the United States. Let us secure these unalienable rights for our children. To transform society into a place that enhances well being of children, let us put into daily practice as Gandhi did the simple motto, "Peace Begins with Me."

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Abstract

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